



Confident Christianity

With George

1 John 5:13-17

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Who here likes rollercoasters? I used to be obsessed! There was a time that I could tell you the exact number of bolts used on a particular rollercoaster and the exact g-force at certain parts of other rollercoasters. I grew up near Alton Towers, so I visited regularly with my friends. You can queue for over 2 hours for some rides, so theme parks developed a fast-track pass at a price. This meant that you could skip to the front of a queue to a separate entrance for

fast-track holders. If those fast-track pass holders decided not to use it or if they didn't really understand what it meant and so queued with the rest of us it just wouldn't make sense. And in some similar way, we as Christians can do that with our faith. We fail to grasp the reality of what Jesus' work means for us. We have saving faith, genuine God-given, Christ-worked, Spirit-sealed faith, and yet we don't live or understand the lifechanging riches that are ours in Christ. Christ brings joyful confidence to our petitions. Are your days defined by the reality of who you are in Christ and how the reality of that shapes you day to day? Do you have joyful confidence in your prayer life?

John opened this whole letter with these words, "We write these to make our joy complete." (1:4) and later he writes, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." (5:13) John wants his readers, who truly believe in the true Jesus, to have full confidence that they have eternal life because there is great need, blessing and joy in being confident in Christ's finished work on the cross. John's joy is made full when he sees his children continuing in the faith, knowing why they believe in the name of the Son of God and rejoicing in the certainty of eternal life.

It might not be so overt at times, but the gospel of the world is being preached on every advert, and in so much of what we see, read and watch today. We know what the attrition of life can do. We might leave here tonight, uplifted by worshipping God together as church and hearing his word preached but tomorrow may be another story. Because of this, we fail to grasp and live in the reality of what Jesus' work means for us. So, my prayer for us today is that we would make John's joy complete. That the Spirit would work richly in us so that we truly grasp what we have in Christ so that we can approach, petition and repent before God with confidence. And, in so doing, learn how we can encourage not just ourselves but others in this. So too, like John, our joy can be complete, as our brothers and sisters grow in assurance and confidence in Christ. But this confidence is not in the work of our hands, but in an 'exchanged death, a changed life and a changed destiny'.

An exchanged death. Jesus died in our place. This is what John is indicting when he writes, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life." (v13) The word 'name' in this context is indicting the person himself. John is referring to the manifestation and revelation of Jesus' character, the Son of God. Praying in Jesus' name is not merely a religious formula that gives it a boost up to heaven. Jesus' name is inseparable from who he is. There are a number of false Jesuses, but the only one true Son of God took on flesh, lived a sinless life which he laid down bearing the full and just wrath of God. He suffered for those he loves and who have faith in him. This death has been called 'The Glorious Exchange' because it is quite simply that. We fall face down in praise and thanks for the exchange that cost Jesus' death and gave us life. It is a glorious exchange indeed.

For all of us who believe, we ceased being what we once were and are born again. Our old sinful person died with Christ and our new self is resurrected with him, as displayed in our baptism. Our assurance must be not in how we feel when we wake up in the morning feeling wretched. We must turn our minds, hearts and souls to the truth of the blood-bought salvation that is ours in Christ Jesus; an objective revelation grasped by knowing. Let us know the truth

so we can teach ourselves the truth when we struggle to believe. Be in the Bible daily as it shapes and reorientates our changing selves to the unchanging one. Our confidence is in the unchanging Christ.

A changed life. Our now. "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we asked of him." (v14) We have confidence in prayer because, if we are born again believers in Jesus, then we are God's adopted children. God hear the prayers of his children. Being free to approach God is one of the greatest privileges of the new covenant. Through Jesus we have immediate access to God in worship and prayer. Our uncleanness has been dealt with; we are wearing robes of Christ's righteousness. We can now simply come in prayer, uninhibited, open and relaxed but not glib, insincere, shallow or cocky. This confidence is compatible with reverence and humility, remembering to whom we are praying. God loves communing with his children, but he doesn't need it. Rather, we need it. "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Heb. 4:16) We need mercy and grace and help because we are needy and we receive in prayer. "O what peace we often forfeit, /O what needless pain we bear/All because we do not carry/everything to God in prayer!

We have a God who listens. "If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." When we grasp that it fuels our prayers because he is the only one who can truly make a difference. Jesus prayed "But not my will but yours." We embrace God's will and align ourselves to it. So let us persevere with bold, free prayers for healing, jobs, ministry and for salvation and trust that the Lord will act according to his good, pleasing and perfect will. Continue in prayer. We are told to pray without ceasing until the time is right. So we continue to pray and ask the Lord yet trust that his will be done. Surely prayer is a delight! This is the truth of a changed life in our 'now.'

A changed destiny Our future. "If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that you should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death." (v16-17) As we approach these verses, let me remind us of Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Sin leads to death, that is what Romans teaches. All sin is contrary to God and an offence to him. Yet, if we are followers of Jesus, our sin is dealt with by Jesus' death. We are separated from it as far as the east is from the west. It holds us no longer.

At the end of the ages we will be in glorified bodies, risen and reigning in and with Christ. But John says (v16), "If you see any brother or sister commit a sin that does not lead to death, you should pray and God will give them life." Sometimes it takes a brother or a sister to help point it out so we can repent and work by the grace of God to slay it. The Lord, in response, works for my awareness, recognition and confession. This has got to be a better state for me than merely just hanging around with unrecognised and unconfessed sin! We have a responsibility to pray that the Lord would make us aware of our sin so we can recognise and confess it. This is not a free pass to be a grouchy Christian who is finger-pointing at everyone's sin. If you start doing that you've missed the whole message of this letter This is a work of love!! John's joy is made full when he sees his children continuing in the faith. So too should our joy be made full when we see our brothers and sisters continuing in faith and believing in the name of the Son of God and rejoicing in the certainty of eternal life.

So verse 16 is an act of love. We pray for our brothers and sisters when we see their sin, that they might be made aware so they can repent. We don't do this because we find them annoying, we do this because we want them to be joyfully assured in Christ and our joy be linked to our brothers' and sisters' joy. Let us rejoice with them in their assurance. That is love. Let us love one another in this way.